

# Agency Coordination Effort Meeting



June 9, 2016

**SCDOT**

## Interstate 73 General Information



- Designated as a high priority corridor by Congress in 1991
- Will improve national and regional connectivity by providing a direct link between the Myrtle Beach Region and I-95 and I-74 in North Carolina
- Will enhance economic opportunities and tourism
- Extends from Sault St. Marie, Michigan to Myrtle Beach. The distance from Hamlet, NC to SC 22 (Veterans Highway) in Horry County is approximately 81 miles
- Total construction cost is approximately \$2.4 billion
- Total funds made available to date approximately \$228 million
- Project website: [www.i73inse.com](http://www.i73inse.com)

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Purpose is to connect Michigan to Myrtle Beach?

## Environmental Information



- A separate EIS was done for each section
- The ROD for I-73 North was signed on August 6, 2008
- The ROD for I-73 South was signed on February 8, 2008
- SCDOT is currently in contract negotiations for a NEPA re-evaluation
- An application for a USACE 404 permit was submitted in January 2011
- SCDOT is currently preparing an updated permit package that includes revised drawings, updated hydrology information, a response to comments, documentation of agency coordination, and other project information

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## Permitting Update



- The project will impact 342.3 acres of wetlands and 4,174 linear feet of stream
- The project spans three watersheds including the Little Pee Dee, the Middle Pee Dee, and the Waccamaw
- The majority of the project impacts are located in the Little Pee Dee HUC and the Middle Atlantic Coastal Plain ecoregion
- The permit has been on-hold while SCDOT develops a final mitigation plan that compensates for all project impacts
- SCDOT has completed the development of the plan and submitted it to the USACE on May 19, 2016
- The I-73 Compensatory Mitigation plan includes the purchase of the Gunter's Island Mitigation Tract and proposes to compensate for all of the wetland and stream impacts associated with I-73

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Use Gunter's Island M. Bank – located in the HUC/Ecoregion



## Proposed Mitigation: Gunter's Island Tract

- Approximately 6,134 acre tract with 11 miles of river corridor along the Little Pee Dee River (a designated ORW by DHEC & an ARNI by EPA).
- The tract has been managed for timber and wildlife since the 1960s.



## Proposed Mitigation: Gunter's Island Tract

- Middle Atlantic Coastal Plain Ecoregion
- Predominantly bottomland hardwood community with approximately 1,821 acres of uplands, mostly in planted lobloll pines



**Proposed Mitigation: Gunter's Island Tract**



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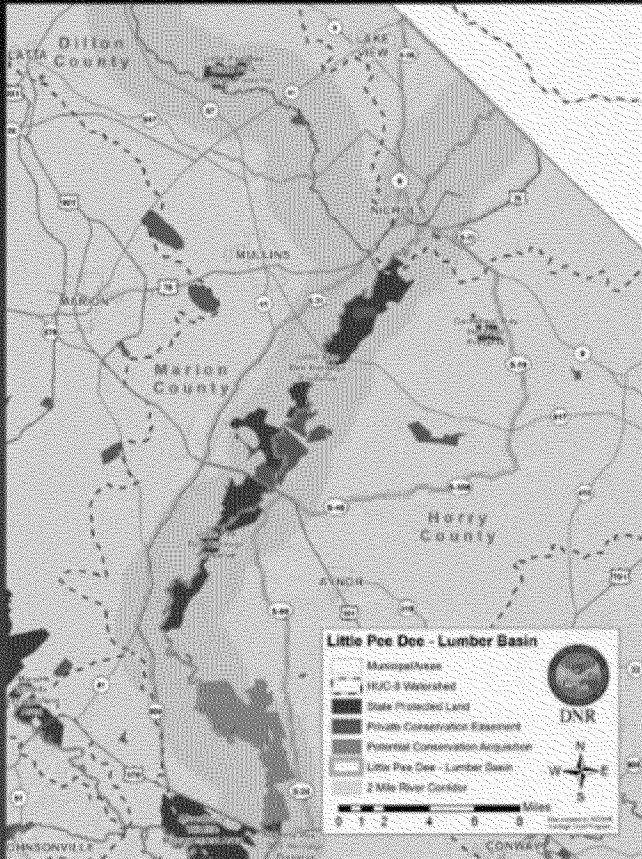
## Proposed Mitigation: Gunter's Island Tract



- Henric Preserve \MVA' majority of Little Bee Dec approximately 3 miles south of the protection as the tract is about finite efforts to land Preserve' and of Little Bee Dec Henric
- Conservancy to the Johnson tract US 318' miles just across the river and Hay Woodbury Wildlife Management
- Conservancy of habitat to
- An tract 80 acre Carolina Bay' complex' provided stream and wetland 4,240'0 acres of wetlands in a
- 80,830 linear feet of stream and protection for
- The mitigation tract would provide

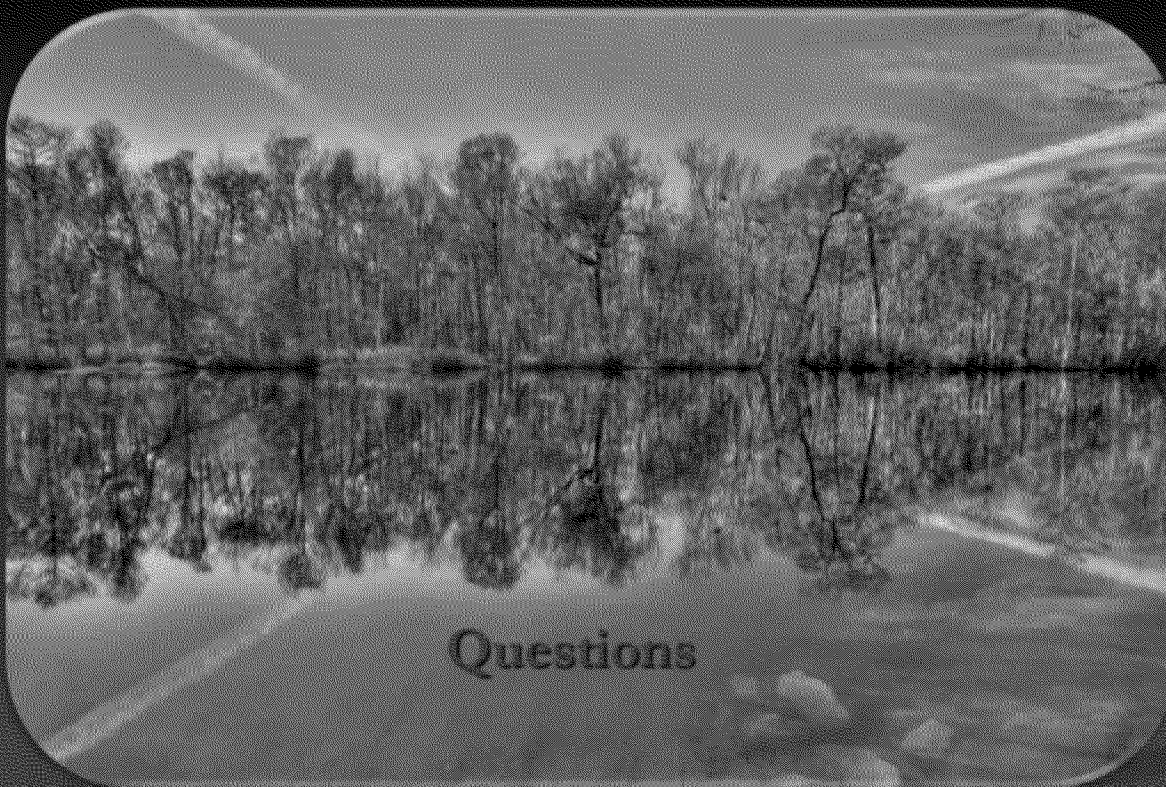
Proposed Mitigation: Gunter's Island Tract





## Proposed Mitigation: Gunter's Island Tract

- The mitigation tract would provide protection for
  - 89,836 linear feet of stream and 4,540.9 acres of wetlands in a braided stream and wetland complex,
  - An intact 85 acre Carolina Bay,
  - Connectivity of habitat to Woodbury Wildlife Management Area just across the river and Hwy US 378,
  - Connectivity to the Johnson tract of Little Pee Dee Heritage Preserve, and
  - Spur future efforts in land protection as the tract is approximately 3 miles south of the majority of Little Pee Dee Heritage Preserve/WMA.



Questions



My notes – the meeting was recorded! Only for the roll call portion.

A US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Section 404 permit application was submitted on January 28, 2011, for authorization to impact approximately 342 acres of wetlands and 4,174 linear feet of stream.

Because of time lapse since the earlier NEPA/2 EIS preparation, it will be re-evaluated to determine relevance and new information requirements. New mitigation plan is being proposed. A separate EIS was done for each section of the project. A record of decision (ROD) was signed for the North Section on August 6, 2008, and the ROD for the South Section was signed on February 8, 2008.

Bulk of mitigation is preservation. Purchase the site and transfer to the state's heritage program. Potential restoration areas – 4 crossings and water fowl habitat. The site has been owned by International Paper Company for timbering. Famous for disrupting wetland hydrology as part of its business. Remnant oxbow channels. Lot of road bedding, ditching, - tremendous opportunity. Early 1980s was a helicopter logging effort – one tree at a time for cypress trees. During this public notice period – learn where the restoration potentials are for this area. Because this site is so large, may be a benefit for closer evaluation to determine restoration potential to determine what the enhancement component is as part of the mitigation.

The preservation opportunities are huge for this site. The wetlands including cypress – significant wetlands acreage is pristine. 13:1 and 19:1 stream preservation plus 11 miles of river frontage on a high quality stream. Hail gold mine EPA's ratio was mentioned as perhaps being relevant.

Calculation SOP is very difficult for a large 70+ mile project (mentions ACT?) We agree large projects need large mitigation areas.

Query about the Sandy Island migration bank is closed out for Carolina Bay. No credits available for this and all future projects.

Steve? ACE? - Public notice for the plan to use Gunter's Island will be forthcoming with more details?

Response: Prefer to handle any agreements through SC DNR. Don't want to get into normal mitigation of specific mitigation details. Prefer the Haile Gold Mine approach using landscape scale plan. Don't want the state to be accountable for specific commitments. Hopefully the huge preservation component potential will meet mitigation requirements.

Steve ACE – will like more plan specifics prior to the public notice. Would like the agencies to have this plan at that time. SC DOT is close to having a releasable plan for Agency review – in the next week or so. It will address as much as possible the 404b guidance requirements. Ten electronic copies will be distributed to state/federal agencies. Electronic version will do with an original for the ACE. SC DOT will also upload on the project's website.

Steve, ACE – had a question with the SC DOT's "waters" number. No JD has been done. There's millions? SC DOT is hoping there is enough existing data to make the case. Some field work has been done to verify the available information. SC DOT believes it will error on the actual number being greater than what SC DOT has provided. SC DOT – the specific acreage/credits is not as important as the ecological value.

Steve/ACE – then it is really important to have that ecological baseline defined. Without the baseline, cannot demonstrate the change. Restoration of an area used for pine timber – it is good to document what was there before, including ecological functions, and what happened after. Lot of discussion on this topic! Need to flesh this out as part of SC DOT's plan – it has not been done yet. SC DOT thinks it can be done. Like to target the overall ecological function of the area with emphasis on the existing wetlands (but they said they are pristine!)

Steve/ACE the plan talks a lot about the benefits. There is a lot of functions supported by this system. Need support for "this is really good stuff." SC DOT discusses a lot of benefits to the watershed and adjoining land uses, like connectivity with other state preserved tracts. SC DOT stated it followed the format of the Mitigation Rule in developing their plan. No one at the meeting has had a chance to look at SC DOT's plan.

Steve/ACE – requested more discussion on the P3 – the public – private relationship/agreement details requested. SC DOT – this will be rolled into a supplemental (NEPA?) document.

A very robust long term steward agreement developed/signed with SC DHEC & SCDNR on same day the Haile Gold Mine permit was issued. Addresses the process/time frame for addressing historical process. Addresses timber harvest and areas for enhancement. The COE has given flexibility to time with timber market conditions. Gives the steward and opportunity to finance its stewardship. Dedicated under the Heritage Trust Act – strongest state protection instrument the state has, stronger than a conservation easement. SC DOT has an opportunity to move pretty quickly. Public comment is required on the proposed management plan. SHPO and SCDHEC have been given a courtesy copy of the plan.

Timeline remains tbd

Chris/SC DOT - North portion – lot of the hydrology work has not been done yet. Final design work remains to be completed. Need agreements with the property owner. Have 9 months to move forward on the Gunter's Island acquisition. The supplemental information will include responses to previous comments on the original proposed I-73. Question on PN for 404 directed to me, I deferred to Kelly.

ESA Section 7 consultation – query on status of this. This will be a “Categorical Exclusion” project since this is not a federally funded acquisition. The state’s action is merely purchasing, which will have no direct effect. The impact will occur when the steward implements its action. The ESA survey will be done as part of the acquisition? Preliminary surveys have been done and more detailed will have to be done. So the ESA part in the PN will be incomplete. US FWS(?) wants to take every opportunity to identify ESA listed species to boost its database. Seeking state’s assist. SC DOT affirmed using its available technical resources to assist the service. SC DOT suggests ACE permit be conditioned with performance of ESA survey prior to any restoration activities taking place.

SC DOT is not anticipating any new impacts – proposed action will be built on same alignment and same alternatives as evaluated in the earlier 2 EIS.

SC DOT may have a product to the ACE by the end of the week.

Steve/ACE – has SC DOT reached out to the groups that have been very vocal about this project in the past. Will we go back to weekly conference calls with parties of interest? No, it may be monthly? Mention names of “Walker” and “Travis”

Heather proposes follow up with Kelly on the “Q” Public Notice. Steve suggested talking to Travis. Some thoughts is the need to respond to prior comments goes away. All previous comments are considered null and void. New ones have to be made.